Technology and the question of non-anthropology

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LIFE TECHNOLOGY BEYOND SIMONDON

Life and Technology

After Simondon Series

Edited by Erich Hörl and Yuk Hui

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Life and Technology: An Inquiry Into and Beyond Simondon

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After Simondon Series Preface

Thanks largely to the works of philosophers who are inspired by him, most notably Gilles Deleuze and Bernard Stiegler, the name Gilbert Simondon is becoming more and more familiar to readers outside France. Up to the time of writing this preface, however, few of his works have been translated into English. It is almost an irony that we call this book series *After Simondon*, dedicated as it is to a thinker who is not yet fully available to his readers. However, *After Simondon* does not mean to overtake Simondon by declaring his thought obsolete, but rather to address him as our contemporary. Indeed, there are challenging contemporary issues that Simondon did not and could not address in his time, yet which his thought retains the power to interrogate, problematize, critique and illuminate.

This book series traces the implications as well as the critiques of Simondon's thought. It aims to go one step further than simply resituating Simondon as a neglected great twentieth-century philosopher of technology. Simondon was not merely a philosopher of technology but rather one whose ambition was nothing less than to rewrite the history of philosophy according to the concept of individuation and to invent a philosophical thinking that could effectively integrate technology into culture. *After Simondon* thus poses the question: What could critical thinking and theory concerning technology and individuation be *after* Simondon—that is, both *following* Simondon but also *going beyond* him and transgressing his thought?

We contend that Simondon's concepts and observations could serve as a rich source for the development of new concepts, theories and practices for coping with our contemporary condition. This includes a wide range of topics from digital objects and techno- and media-ecologies to what might be called a 'technological humanism'; from individuation, inventions and imaginations to perceptions; from animals to technical systems; and from issues of the automatic and alienation in the

twenty-first century to the process of cyberneticization. We hope that this series can act as a continuation of Simondon's projects, and we welcome proposals from scholars who are working on such subjects in relation to Simondon's thought.

Erich Hörl and Yuk Hui
Summer, 2015

Author's Preface to the English Translation

The texts brought together here were first published in French in two contributed volumes, edited respectively by Jean-Claude Ameisen and Laurent Cherlonneix, and by the late Jean-Marie Vaysse.[1] Erich Hörl and Yuk Hui had the idea of selecting these two texts to inaugurate the series *After Simondon*, and I thank them warmly for this. My aim is to provide the reader with a rigorous presentation of some of Simondon's key ideas, along with some developments that we can today bring to them.

Indeed, these two texts share a double ambition. On the one hand, to analyse the general—and in my view the most profound—logic of what I refer to in my work as Simondon's "genetic encyclopaedism." And, on the other, to lead beyond Simondon, in the direction of that comprehensive but open (because anti-dogmatic) system on which I am working at the moment, and for which the concluding part of the second text establishes some strictly architectonic principles. In this respect, I would like to congratulate Barnaby Norman for his work of translation. Philosophical language is, we say in French, "a language in a language [*une langue dans une langue*]," and Barnaby Norman was able to convey this philosophical language into the English version.

1 Jean-Claude Ameisen and Laurent Cherlonneix, eds., *Nouvelles représentations de la vie en biologie et philosophie du vivant* [New Representations of Life in Biology and the Philosophy of the Living Being] (Brussels: De Boeck, 2013); Jean-Marie Vaysse, ed., *Technique, monde, individuation: Heidegger, Simondon, Deleuze* [Technics, Life, Individuation: Heidegger, Simondon, Deleuze] (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 2006).

Technology and the Question of Non-Anthropology

Introduction: Non-Anthropology; or, The Conditions of a Dialogue

What are the initial conditions of a dialogue between Simondon and Heidegger? If the question arises, it is because the difference between these two thinkers at first seems irreducible, to such a degree that the dialogue risks, through an absence of common ground, becoming a misunderstanding. But common ground there is, and it is most apparent with respect to the major theme of technology.[1] To be precise, it is not a misunderstanding that will underwrite the dialogue between Heidegger and Simondon, but their mutual demand for a *non-"anthropological"* thinking of technology.

1 Translator's note: I have translated both *Technik* (from German) and *technique* (from French) as "technology" for the sake of consistency with the existing translations of Heidegger's essay "The Question Concerning Technology"; it is also noted that Simondon uses the French word "technologie" when he refers to the study of "technique(s)."

For Simondon, the word "anthropology" is not to be understood in any of its classical senses but designates, on the one hand, an essentialist thinking which cuts human being off from the living, and on the other, a thinking that reduces technology to its use by human being—to what Simondon refers to as the "labor paradigm." It is Simondon's critique of this second aspect of anthropological thought that we will soon be examining. For the moment we emphasize that whereas Simondon's critique of these two aspects of anthropology has led some to suppose that he was an anti-humanist, his stance seeks only to rehabilitate technology, on the one hand, and philosophy of nature on the other, without this being to the detriment of human being. It is only really possible to understand Simondon here if we accept that he privileges a subversion of classical conceptual oppositions and conflicts of views.[2] So, in both *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques* [On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects] (which was his supplementary thesis for his *doctorat d'État*) and *L'individuation à la lumière des notions de forme et d'information* [Individuation in the Light of Notions of Form and Information] (which was his main thesis), the French philosopher rejects the conceptual oppositions of nature/culture and technology/culture. It is the presence of a third classical opposition—between nature and technology—that betrays the weakness of these two conceptual oppositions. It is precisely by subverting this third opposition that Simondon will subvert the first two.

2 I dedicated the whole of Chapter II of my book *Simondon* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 2014) to this privileging. Here I will simply recall that Simondon not only rejects the alternatives realism/idealism, empiricism/innatism and skepticism/dogmatism, which had already been challenged by Kant and his successors, but also the oppositions mechanism/vitalism, psychologism/sociologism and humanism/technicism, against which he directed the bulk of his work. I showed that underlying all these theoretical alternatives there is the conceptual opposition matter/form, which is hidden in each of the theses. It is to this opposition that Simondon, for his part, brings back the opposition between the philosophizing subject and his object that had already been interrogated by Heidegger.

Simondon's privileging of a subversion of classical oppositions was rightly highlighted by Gilles Châtelet in his article "Simondon" for the *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, and with this privileging Simondon is closer to the book *Pour l'homme* [For Man] by his phenomenologist friend Mikel Dufrenne than to so-called anti-humanist thinkers. Indeed, *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques* criticizes what it calls "an easy humanism,"[3] which is not humanism in general, but only what one might call "a far too easy humanism." In opposition to this, it is for him a matter of establishing what I would like to call a "difficult humanism,"[4] which is to say, a humanism compatible with the critique of the two aspects of "anthropology" as defined by Simondon. On the one hand, this difficult humanism integrates human reality into *physis*, and on the other technology into culture. These two integrations are in fact for Simondon just one, since technology, he says, is itself what "expresses" "nature" in its connection with the "subject": the technical object is the extension of life through which that life can go beyond itself in a relationship referred to as "transindividual." So, Simondon says, the technical object is nature having become a "support" for what extends and overcomes simple life. This, briefly stated, is the subversion of the first two classical oppositions by way of the subversion of the third.

Now, for Heidegger, the word "anthropology" once again refers to a twofold naivety: on the one hand, anthropology is a thinking that reduces the essence of human being to a "present-at-hand being" (*étant-là-devant* / *vorhandenes Seiende*), when this essence is, for Heidegger, "Being-there" (*Dasein*); on the other hand, anthropology is a thinking that reduces technology to its use by human being. This second aspect brings us back to what is also

3 Gilbert Simondon, *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques* (Paris: Aubier, 1958), 9.

4 I have developed this theme in two texts: "What New Humanism Today?," trans. Chris Turner, *Cultural Politics* 6, no. 2 (2010): 237–52; and "L'humanisme ne prend sens que comme combat contre un type d'aliénation" (interview with Ludovic Duhem), *Tête-à-tête*, no. 5 (2013): 54–67.

rejected by Simondon. So, it is here that a true dialogue is possible, and the question that we will pose to set this dialogue up is, of course, the following: How, in its concepts and its theses, should a non-anthropological thinking of technology take shape? Now, the common thesis of non-anthropology will not be understood in the same way by the two thinkers, not only with respect to the first meaning of the word "anthropology," but also with respect to the second. This is the situation: the first aspect of anthropology as defined by Heidegger does not match the first aspect of anthropology as defined by Simondon. Saying that anthropology reduces the essence of human being to a present-at-hand being is not the same as saying that anthropology cuts human being off from the living. Each of the two thinkers would situate the other within anthropology—for Simondon, Heidegger is still effecting an essentialist break while, for Heidegger, Simondon is still effecting a reduction of the essence of human being to present-at-hand being.[5] But for Simondon, as for Heidegger, the two aspects of the anthropology they set out to challenge go together, so the understanding of the second aspect will also differ between the two, despite the verbal similarity possible in the initial diagnosis. The construction of non-anthropology will therefore be different for each of our two thinkers, as much in its second as in its first aspect. This is what we must now confirm by bringing our analysis to bear upon only the second aspect of non-anthropology—the aspect relating to technology—and by beginning with an exposition of Simondon's position.

5 It *doesn't* mean that Simondon reduces human being to a thing. What Heidegger criticizes as an "objectification" (*Ver-gegen-ständlichung*) is not what in French is called "*chosification*" (*Verdinglichung*) but *a more general attitude of knowledge* that one might call "objectivation." I have authorized the translator to use the *classical* English translation, that is to say "objectification," but one must keep in mind these remarks.

The Non-Anthropological Thinking of Technology in Simondon

L'individuation à la lumière des notions de forme et d'information considered the individuation—which is to say, in Simondon's work, the *genesis*—of physical, vital, and psycho-social or "transindividual" beings. *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques* considers the individuation of technical beings in that they are also a genesis. It is only by way of the latter that it is possible, according to Simondon, to bring out the sense of technical objects, and to reinstate technics with respect to its participation in culture. This is why the first part of the book is titled "Genèse et évolution des objets techniques" ["Genesis and Evolution of Technical Objects"]. From the start, it is a question of refusing to define the technical object starting from a classification into genres and species of the individual considered as a given. Here, as in his main thesis, "it is better to reverse the problem: it is starting from criteria of genesis that it is possible to define the individuality and specificity of the technical object."[6] But it is the *labor* paradigm which, for Simondon, seems to order the traditional classification of technical objects into genres and species. This labor paradigm, when it is considered as a *social relationship* between a master and a slave, is an *unconscious* paradigm of the hylomorphism against which Simondon is fighting in his work, the *conscious* paradigm of which lies, he says, in the *technical* operation of casting bricks.[7] Indeed, it is the labor paradigm that orders the reduction of technical objects to their usage, which in turn defines the genres and species whose illusory character is condemned by Simondon:

6 Simondon, *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques*, 20.

7 See Simondon, *L'individuation à la lumière des notions de forme et d'information* (Grenoble: Millon, 2005), Part I, Chapter I; and my commentary in *Penser l'individuation: Simondon et la philosophie de la nature* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005), Chapter II, 4. This commentary is taken up again in abridged form in my book *Simondon*, 106–110.

> species are easy to summarily distinguish, for practical use, as long as it is accepted that the technical object is to be understood with respect to the practical end to which it responds; but this is an illusory specificity because no structure corresponds to a defined use. The same result can be obtained starting from very different operations and structures: a steam engine, a petrol engine, a turbine, and spring or weight-powered engines are all engines; but the spring-powered engine is in fact more closely analogous to a bow or a crossbow than to a steam engine; the motor of a weight-driven clock is analogous to a winch, while an electric clock is analogous to a doorbell or buzzer. Use brings heterogeneous operations and structures together in the same genres and species which take their signification from the relationship between this operation and another, that of the human being in action. So, what we call by a single name—engine, for example—may be multiple at a given moment and may vary with time, changing character.[8]

Here it is the opposition between utilitarian character and operation that is central. That the classification of technical objects into genres and species according to their use derives from the unconscious paradigm of hylomorphism constituted by labor, is apparent in this passage, even if implicitly and allusively, in the notion of the subsumption of the object under its use by "the human being in action." Such is the root of what Simondon regards as an "anthropological" reduction of technology. The different engines, for example, only have "a single name" thanks to this illusory subsumption of operation under use, through which the only thing that can truly define a technical object is lost—its genesis:

8 Simondon, *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques*, 19. [The word "operation" is here used to translate "*fonctionnement*," because of the ambiguity of "functioning" and "working": the first doesn't make a clear distinction between the operation and the function or use, and the second refers to work, which Simondon rejects as a blinding paradigm. —Auth. & Trans.]

> The unity of the technical object, its character and specificity, are characteristic of the consistency and convergence of its genesis. The genesis of the technical object appertains to its being. . . . The petrol engine is not just any such engine in time and space, but the fact that there is a development, a continuity from the first engines to those that we know, which are still evolving. In this respect, as in a phylogenetic lineage, a definite evolutionary stage contains in itself dynamic structures and schemas which underlie an evolution of forms. The technical being evolves by convergence and by self-adaptation; it inwardly coheres according to a principle of internal resonance.[9]

Both the beginning and the end of this passage show how the technical object is considered here in terms of the perfecting (*perfectionnement*) of a pre-existing operation describing a "lineage." So the opposition is not between genesis and progress, but between progress with respect to operation and progress with respect to usage, with the latter conforming to totally different criteria than those defining the progress of operation as the genesis of the technical object: "for this or that use, an engine from 1910 is superior to an engine from 1956."[10] Indeed, true technical progress conforms to a principle of "convergence" and unification by virtue of which a reciprocal causality is established through which each element receives its form:

> In a contemporary engine, every important element is so bound up with the others through reciprocal exchanges of energy that it cannot be other than it is. The form of the combustion chamber, the form of the valves and the form of the piston belong to the same system in which there are a multitude of reciprocal causalities. . . . One could say that the contemporary engine is a concrete engine, while the former engine is an abstract engine. In the former engine, each

9 Ibid., 20.

10 Ibid.

> element takes part at a given moment in the cycle, and then it is no longer supposed to act on the other elements.[11]

This is what Simondon, here taking up the Hegelian notions of the abstract and the concrete, calls the process of "concretization" of technical objects. But such a reciprocal causality only "has" its "truth"—again in Hegelian terms—in the idea of the poly-functionality of elements, which alone allows the process of "concretization" to be defined as a process of "convergence." Contrary to the motives determining the usage of a technical object, however, the motives determining its evolution by convergence are not strictly speaking anthropological: "if technical objects evolve in the direction of a small number of specific types, this is due to an internal necessity and does not depend on economic influences or practical requirements."[12] But before clarifying how the "non-anthropological" character of the process of concretization–convergence should be understood, we should note that Simondon, if we follow the text, must consider the "*bespoke*" objects of the artisan as "abstract," in opposition to industrial objects which alone are "concrete": "at the industrial level, the object has acquired its coherence, and it is the system of needs that is less coherent than the system of the object; needs mold themselves to the industrial technical object, which in this way acquires the power to fashion a civilization."[13] These last words point to the progressive autonomization of the process of concretization-convergence, whose "internal necessity" is asserted by Simondon:

> The structural reforms allowing for the specification of the technical object constitute what is essential to the becoming of that object; even if the sciences make no advance during a given period, the progress of the technical object towards specificity can continue to take place; indeed, the principle of this progress is the way in which the object brings itself

11 Ibid., 21.

12 Ibid., 23–24.

13 Ibid., 24 (author's emphasis).

> about and conditions itself in its operation and in the reactions of its operation on use; the technical object, issuing from an abstract labor organizing sub-ensembles, is the scene of a certain number of relations of reciprocal causality. It is these relations which mean that, based on certain limits in the conditions of utilization, the object discovers obstacles within its functioning: *it is in incompatibilities produced from the progressive saturation of the system of sub-ensembles that we find the play of limits whose overcoming is constitutive of progress*; but it is in its nature that this overcoming can only take place through a leap, through a modification of the internal distribution of functions, a rearrangement of their system; what was an obstacle must become a means of realization.[14]

The end of this passage brings us back to what Simondon calls, in a note from the same passage, the "conditions of individuation of a system," conditions which mean that "the specific evolution of technical objects is not completely continuous, nor is it completely discontinuous."[15] Because technical progress in fact changes the obstacles themselves into solutions, it happens by continuous supersaturation and discontinuous individuation, with supersaturation being found in incompatibilities balanced by "detail refinement" of a structure which they do not reorganize but which they end up revealing as problematic, the new individuation being the solution which uses the incompatibilities—simultaneously balanced and revealed by these adjustments—to reorganize the structure itself.

Now that we have made these remarks, we can come back to what I referred to as the "non-anthropological" character of the process of concretization–convergence. Simondon distinguished between the intention on which the fabrication of a technical object is based, which is connected to its operation, and the

14 Ibid., 27–28 (author's emphasis).

15 Ibid., 27.

intention on which its use is based. But the fabricating intention can only explain the genesis of the technical object on condition that this intention is not considered anthropologically, which is to say as originating with a meaning-giving subject similar to the user. In this sense, Simondon does not oppose the Heideggerian thinking of *Gestell*: neither of these two thoughts is—at least at first sight—anthropological, even if Heidegger does not situate the non-anthropological thinking of technology within fabrication. Connected with this restriction there is, as we shall see, a real incompatibility in another sense between these two great thinkers of technology, since Simondon would certainly not have agreed with the Heideggerian thesis according to which "the essence of technology is nothing technological."[16] It is a question of knowing whether this thesis, which "ontologizes" technology in order to "deanthropologize" it, does not originate in an anthropological blind-spot with respect to fabrication, at least from a Simondonian perspective, if the expression "nothing technological" closing the Heideggerian formula means "nothing of a human operation or means." We will now undertake an internal critique of the Heideggerian thinking of technology, which is to say, a critique setting out from the non-anthropological intention of this thinking so as to turn this intention against the Heideggerian mode of its realization.

The Non-Anthropological Thinking of Technology in Heidegger: Towards an Internal Critique of *Gestell*

The way in which Heidegger quite rightly challenges the anthropological thinking of technology may, if examined from Simondon's point of view, in fact seem still metaphysical, even

16 Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper Perennial, 1977), 4. [Translation slightly modified. —Trans.]

"anthropological" in the profound Simondonian sense of the term: for Heidegger, it is still in the name of the essence of human being that the essence of technology is said to have "nothing technological" in itself, which is to say nothing of a simple human operation or simple human means. It is surely not by chance if ultimately "the essence of technology cannot be guided into the metamorphosis of its fate without the aid of human being."[17] We recall in this connection the major steps of "The Question Concerning Technology."[18] In the same way that Simondon had distinguished between technology as operation, on the one hand, and the use to which we habitually reduce it on the other, Heidegger distinguishes between the "essence of technology" and its common representation as a means directed towards an end.[19] Even if this is "correct,"[20] both with respect to the technology of the artisan and to modern technology, the anthropological conception of technology misses, for Heidegger, the true—and no longer simply "correct"—essence of technology. It is an essence that, on this occasion, only modern technology leads us to question: "it is precisely the latter [modern technology] and it alone that is the disturbing thing, that moves us to ask the question concerning technology per se."[21]

17 Martin Heidegger, "The Turning" in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, 39. [NB. The English translation differs in a number of ways from the French version. Here I have translated from the French. The unaltered English version reads as follows: "the coming to presence of technology cannot be led into the change of its destining without the cooperation of the coming to presence of man." —Trans.]

18 For a commentary, see Jacques Taminiaux, "L'essence vraie de la technique," in *Cahier de l'Herne: Heidegger*, ed. Michel Haar (Paris: Editions de l'Herne, 1983), 263–84.

19 As I said earlier, Heidegger nevertheless situates fabrication on the side of use, and so in an "instrumental and anthropological definition of technology" ("The Question Concerning Technology," 10). We may conclude from this that Simondon remains naive, but it is in fact Heidegger who shifts the non-anthropological nature of the process of concretization in favor of a *destinal* thinking of technology, as we shall see.

20 Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," 5.

21 Ibid., 13–14.

58 One must, nevertheless, distinguish between the essence of modern technology and the essence of technology: even if one leads to the questioning of the other, it cannot be reduced to it, and it is precisely for this reason that the questioning it brings about is "disturbing." To start with, the essence of technological bringing-forth (*pro-duction*) is not artificial fabrication but the "disclosure" from which bringing-forth proceeds, which is *physis* itself:

> It is of the utmost importance that we think the bringing-forth [*la pro-duction, Hervor-bringen*] in its full scope and at the same time in the sense in which the Greeks thought it. . . . *Physis* also, the arising of something from out of itself, is a bringing-forth [*une pro-duction*], *poiēsis*. . . . Occasioning has to do with the presencing [*Anwesen*] of that which at any given time comes to appearance in bringing-forth. Bringing-forth [*Le pro-duire*] brings hither out of concealment forth into unconcealment. Bringing-forth [*Pro-duire*] comes to pass only insofar as something concealed comes into unconcealment. . . . Technology is therefore no mere means. Technology is a way of revealing. If we give heed to this, then another whole realm for the essence of technology will open itself up to us. It is the realm of revealing, i.e., of truth [*Wahr-heit*].[22]

Let us jump ahead so as to note straight away the difference between this technology and modern technology: the essence of modern technology is Enframing (*Gestell*) as a mode of unconcealment, a particular mode which paradoxically obscures unconcealment. That which leads us to question the essence of technology is the thing that both reveals and conceals that essence: "the unconcealment in accordance with which nature presents itself as a calculable complex of the effects of forces can indeed permit correct determinations; but precisely through these successes the danger can remain that in the midst of all that is correct

22 Ibid., 11–12. One page later, Heidegger writes: "It is as revealing, and not as manufacturing, that *technē* is a bringing-forth."

the true will withdraw."[23] This is still only a temporary formulation of the paradox mentioned above, but already at this stage we should ask how it is justified. First of all by the fact that it is specific to modern technology that is does not unfold "into a bringing-forth [*une pro-duction*] in the sense of *poiēsis*. The revealing that rules in modern technology is a challenging [*Herausfordern*], which puts to nature the unreasonable demand that it supply energy that can be extracted and stored as such."[24] And secondly by the fact that the mode of unconcealment that is *Gestell* as the essence of modern technology makes technology appear as a scientific application, so concealing the fact that it makes scientific "exactitude" possible:

> Because the essence of modern technology lies in Enframing, modern technology must employ exact physical science. Through its doing so, the deceptive illusion arises that modern technology is applied physical science. This illusion can maintain itself only so long as neither the essential origin of modern science nor indeed the essence of modern technology is adequately found out through questioning.[25]

To this is added the further illusion whereby man only ever encounters himself and his works, while Enframing is not his doing but what calls him forth, reducing man himself to a standing reserve. So, in Enframing (*Gestell*), "unconcealment" as destiny (*Geschick*) comes about as a danger or peril (*Gefahr*). But this is ultimately due to the fact that in Enframing, as the "essence" of modern technology, the retreat of unconcealment carries the day, dissociating the truth of Being from itself in its essence—a formula whose meaning we will need to clarify:

> Where Enframing holds sway, regulating and securing of the standing-reserve mark all revealing. They no longer even let

23 Ibid., 26.
24 Ibid., 14.
25 Ibid., 23.

> their own fundamental characteristic appear, namely, this revealing as such.
>
> Thus the challenging Enframing not only conceals a former way of revealing, bringing-forth, but it conceals revealing itself and with it That wherein unconcealment, i.e., truth, comes to pass.
>
> Enframing blocks the shining-forth and holding-sway of truth. The destining that sends into ordering is consequently the extreme danger. What is dangerous is not technology. There is no demonry of technology, but rather there is the mystery of its essence. The essence of technology, as destining of revealing, is the danger.[26]

But even though it is from itself as essence that the truth of Being is dissociated by Enframing, it is Enframing that bears the "advent" (*Ereignis*) of "another beginning" (*anderer Anfang*), one where, by way of the "essence" of technology, the truth of Being is no longer an essence: "It is technology itself that makes the demand on us to think in another way what is usually understood as 'essence' ['*Wesen*']."[27] This is how Heidegger understands his recourse to Hölderlin's phrase: "But where danger is, grows the saving power also."[28] And it is precisely at this point that the Heideggerian thinking of technology opens onto another non-anthropology, which is no doubt truer to itself because it has dispatched any "destiny" bound to the "essence of human being": the non-anthropology of Simondon's thinking of human being and technology.

Let us be clear. If the reign of technology is the last epoch in the history of Being itself inasmuch as it does not reveal itself except in its retreat, it is still the case that this terminal unconcealment

26 Ibid., 27–28. See also "The Turning": Heidegger declares that when the danger has been brought to light, then, as we shall see, the exit from metaphysics also becomes possible.

27 Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," 30.

28 Ibid., 28.

of Being marks the accomplishment of metaphysics as the objectification and forgetting of Being:

> The world changes into object. In this revolutionary objectifying of everything that is, the earth, that which first of all must be put at the disposal of representing and setting forth, moves into the midst of human positing and analyzing. The earth itself can show itself only as the object of assault, an assault that, in human willing, establishes itself as unconditional objectification. Nature appears everywhere—because willed from out of the essence of Being—as the object of technology.[29]

The anti-metaphysical character of the thinking of *Gestell* involves understanding this accomplishment of metaphysics in *Gestell*. There is in this accomplishment a fundamental ambiguity—on the one hand, *Gestell* completes the objectification of being and the forgetting of Being as it conducts the object (*Gegenstand*) towards a "standing-reserve" (*Bestand*); but on the other, because the *ob*-ject defines *Vorhandenheit*, the "standing-reserve" which extends it already and necessarily gestures outside *Vorhandenheit*, and is "*zuhanden*" and revelatory of being-in-the-world, as well as being the accomplishment of metaphysics. The fundamental ambiguity of the "standing-reserve" is evident in this passage: "Yet an airliner that stands on the runway is surely an object. Certainly. We can represent the machine so. But then it conceals itself as to what and how it is. Revealed, it stands on the taxi strip only as a standing-reserve, inasmuch as it is ordered to ensure the possibility of transportation."[30] The means of transport only differs from the object because it is also a reference and not just

29 Heidegger, "The Word of Nietzsche: 'God is Dead,'" in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, 100.

30 Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," 17. To observe the ambiguity of Heidegger"s thinking of the subject-object relation, one need only read "Science and Meditation." Here it is the ambiguity of "reserve" (*Bestand*), simultaneously the accomplishment of metaphysics and the exit from the "object" which characterized it.

a means in which the essence of technology is radically forgotten. In other words, *Gestell* as the essence of modern technology itself reveals here what only *Sein und Zeit* had previously revealed: the irreducibility of being to the *Vorhandenheit* of the object, which is to say the system of reference that is the world as a complex of "tools," and which the "artisanal instrument"[31] is incapable of revealing *because* that is what it is. The fact that Heidegger says here that the artisanal instrument is "independent," opposing it in this way to the "absolutely dependent"[32] modern machine, does not invalidate our interpretation, but rather confirms that modern *Gestell* produced *Sein und Zeit* itself: not that Heidegger had denied his own thought in the meantime,[33] but that the forgetting of forgetting that is *Gestell* bears within itself the thinking of Being, inaugurated in *Sein und Zeit*, as "that which saves," because the modern machine can no longer conceal itself as "reference."

So, if Enframing, the "essence" of modern technology, is a destining of unconcealment which has become a "danger" in that it has withdrawn completely, then this is ultimately because the aspect of the withdrawal constitutive of any unconcealment is absent, revealing that the truth of Being is not essence, a revelation that is the pure withdrawal constitutive of this absence of withdrawal.[34] Such is the non-self-identity of the truth of Being

31 Ibid., 17.

32 Ibid.

33 On this point see the "Letter to Richardson," in William Richardson, *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought*, 4th ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003).

34 On the "identity crisis" of Being at the end of metaphysics, see Michel Haar's very fine text, "Le tournant de la détresse," in *Cahier de l'Herne: Heidegger*, 335–36. On what we will call the "antinomies" of the thinking of Being, see Heidegger's *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995). This text, which is without doubt one of Heidegger's most fundamental, prefigures—conceptually and so aporetically rather than poetically—the final "tautological thinking." The return to Anaximander made by Heidegger after this course in texts such as "The Anaximander Fragment" (in *Early Greek Thinking*, trans. David F. Krell & Frank A. Capuzzi [New York: Harper &

qua non-question, and the Heideggerian thinking of the essence of technology—as *Gestell* bearing *Ereignis*—is what allows philosophy to take leave of the (non-)question of Being. By which we understand that in the end this (non-)question could only come to what we will call its self-transcending sense by finally uncovering, in the fundamental ambiguity of *Gestell* bearing *Ereignis*,[35] its own metaphysical—anthropological, even—unthought: the determination of "technology" as something instrumental and human, which (ontologically) differs from the "essence of technology." If, on the contrary, Heidegger had made an initial distinction between use—of means by human being—and fabrication-operation—he would not have reduced technology in this way and

Row, 1975], 13–58) could be interpreted as a falling back of the Heideggerian history of Being into a posture that is only non-Hegelian in a Hegelian way, and which consists of absorbing the history of Being into the "beginning" that was unrecognized by Hegel. Not that I, for my part, do not recognize the difference that Heidegger, starting from this Hegelian non-recognition of the "beginning," means to indicate between himself and Hegel "with respect to the intention of thought, with respect to the law and character of a dialogue with the history of thought"—which is the difference between the *Aufhebung* and the "step back" (see *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969], 49). "Thinking recedes before its matter, Being, and thus brings what is thought into a confrontation in which we behold the whole of this history—behold it with respect to what constitutes the source of this entire thinking, because it alone establishes and prepares for this thinking the area of its abode. In contrast to Hegel, this is not a traditional problem, already posed, but what has always remained unasked throughout this history of thinking." (Ibid., 50) However, apart from the fact that we have here a reading of Hegel which Heidegger himself would, in other texts, authorize us to challenge, it is not certain that it is possible to escape Hegel as long as you lay claim to the "source" of the history of thinking. In order to examine this point, I could refer to a polemical revival of the French interpretation of Heidegger, precisely as concerns his problematic relationship with Hegel. In writing this I am thinking in particular of the work of Christian Ferrié and François Raffoul.

35 More precisely, "What we experience in the Enframing as the constellation of Being and man through the modern world of technology is a *prelude* to what is called the event of appropriation [*Er-eignis*]" (*Identity and Difference*, 36, author's emphasis). [Translation slightly modified. —Trans.]

would not have relied on the ontological difference to save the *essence* of technology from this supposedly ontic sphere.

From Possible Dialogue to Inevitable Misunderstanding: The Self-Transcendence of Heidegger's Questioning and Simondon's Unthought

This internal critique of Heidegger's thinking of technology should not lead us to think that Simondon has brought the matter to a conclusion. If it is true that one may discern an auto-transcendent meaning in Heidegger's thought, as I have been able to elsewhere with respect to Husserl,[36] then the metaphysical and anthropological unthought in Heidegger's thinking is only the other side of a questioning to come, borne already by this thought and whose depths exceed Simondon's ontogenetic problematic. This is what I must now elucidate. It is my conviction that the two problematics, Simondon's and the one whose simple possibility is indicated in Heidegger's thinking, can be articulated on the basis of the internal critique of Heidegger's thinking as it presents itself—and not as it would like to present itself: that is, as radically non-objectivizing.[37] Just like the question of non-anthropology, the question of non-objectification is in fact a question that brings Heidegger and Simondon together. But it makes the first into the precursor of a radically non-objectivizing problematic for which Simondonian ontology furnishes a secondary translation—secondary because less profound, even if appropriate. In order to understand this, I am going to start from an unresolved paradox from the preceding discussion. Here is the paradox: it has emerged that Heidegger's

36 See my article, "Husserl et l'auto-transcendance du sens," *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger,* no. 2 (2004). On the concept of the auto-transcendence of sense, see also my book *Penser l'individuation,* Introduction, 2.

37 Here I use "objectivizing" rather than "objectifying" in order to express *my own* thought. On the English translation of Heidegger on this score, see n. 5.

thinking of technology is in a sense more anthropological than Simondon's, and yet it is also in a sense more destinal—destiny not being understood here as that imposed on human being by technology, but as that imposed on human being by his own essence. Now, this destinal thinking is only really what it is because, we remarked above, the essence of human being is no longer understood as an essence in which human being would belong to himself—from which arises the concept of "Being-there" (*Dasein*). But to say that the essence is no longer strictly speaking essence, is to prepare the exit from this anthropology which until this point had been paradoxically reconciled with destinal thinking. Conversely, Simondon's non-anthropology has also ultimately emerged as relatively destinal: technics comes to shape a civilization through a process of "concretization" which makes it auto-conditioning. There is no paradox here but, on the contrary, a very logical association between non-anthropology (assumed this time) and destinal thinking. Now, Heideggerian destiny differs from Simondonian destiny because for Heidegger it is ultimately neither technology nor human being that is destined, but Being. And yet the fact that the question of Being proves to be a non-question does not in any sense indicate that there could not be a question more radical than Simondon's ontogenetic question—a more radical question which, if based on an internal critique of Heideggerian thought, may well lead this time, in a second instance, to Simondon's ontogenetic and non-anthropological thinking, as though to both validate it and put it into perspective, all the while liberating it from the destinal character that burdens it. It is this point that I would like to clarify in conclusion.

Even if the internal critique of the Heideggerian thinking of *Gestell* seems to vindicate Simondon while rebuking Heidegger for staying within an anthropological thinking of technology, there nevertheless remains what we highlighted right at the beginning: in Heidegger's view, Simondon would, for his part, adhere to an anthropological reduction of the essence of human being

to a being-present-at-hand. Not that this rebuke can stand as it is, since it is made in the name of an essence of human being which is now problematic. But the accusation of a reduction to being-present-at-hand is doubtless valid beyond the debate over the essence of human being: the reduction to being-present-at-hand is not characterized as a particular thesis that Heidegger would decry, but as a general attitude of the philosophizing individual himself.[38] Now, Simondon's ontogenetic problematic may well remain in keeping with this attitude, to the extent that what Heideggerian "ontological difference" names is the exit from this kind of attitude by way of a double phenomenological reduction leading—beyond Husserl's still egological intentionality—to being-in-the-world; while Simondon, for his part, makes no reduction—except, maybe, a Bergsonian "reduction to becoming."[39] To emphasize: speaking of a "double reduction" with respect to Heidegger does not mean that he remains within the phenomenological sphere as defined by Husserl, but that the thinking of being-in-the-world may be understood as a "reduction" which comes to limit the pretentions of the first reduction while benefitting from the "step back" inherent in what it thus limits: "fundamental" ontology is the heir to phenomenology in its distinction from ontology. It is this distancing that Simondon's properly ontological, even cosmological, approach, which derives more from Bergson, does not possess.

Of course, genetic ontology or "ontogenesis," is characterized, as Simondon says, by a certain "ontological difference," which in addition indicates once more a way out of the objectification of being. At issue is the difference between the individual and pre-individual reality—the latter, incidentally, referred to by

38 On the limits of this archi-reflexive questioning in Heidegger, see my article "Hegel et l'impensé de Heidegger," *Kairos*, no. 27 (2006): 89–110.

39 The expression is taken from Merleau-Ponty's "Bergson se faisant," *Bulletin de la Société française de philosophie*, no. 1 (1960): 35–45.

Simondon as "Being *qua* Being".[40] In any case, Simondon's conceptual configuration is neither clear nor radical and self-sufficient. Firstly, it is not clear because individuation, which is the non-*ob*ject, is both the same as and different to the pre-individual as it differs from the individual. And it is not radical and self-sufficient, but based on what Simondon calls "schemas of physical thinking."[41] In fact, and more profoundly still, the way in which Simondon anchors his approach in Bergsonian and Bachelardian themes indicates that he misses the primacy of the anti-foundational and radical question of sense. It is certainly possible to say that Simondon develops the genetic and anti-substantialist ontology that is the counterpart to Bachelardian epistemology.[42] But it is precisely because of this that he prevents himself from giving his questioning of the subject-object relationship the necessary depth and reflexivity that would allow it to catch sight of the paradoxical constitution of the subject by the object understood as sense—a paradoxical constitution that in fact only a double reduction reversing "natural" or naive intentionality allows us to glimpse.

Even if the Heideggerian question of Being cannot be completely identified with this question of sense either, it leads to it, at least

40 Simondon, *L'individuation à la lumière des notions de forme et d'information*, 317. In the Introduction of the same book, Simondon uses the expression "Being as it *is*," which indicates that what he calls "Being" (*Sein / être*) would be a being (*Seiende / étant*) from Heidegger's point of view: in Heidegger, Being *isn't*, but "there is" Being (*es gibt Sein / il y a l'être*).

41 Ibid., 327–28. The "biological" or "technical" (*ibid.*) schemas of thinking are in fact based on these physical schemas, in Simondon, thanks to *contemporary* physics, which broadens physical rationality. That is why the conclusion of the book only develops the question of the physical schemas.

42 On this point see my book *Simondon ou l'encyclopédisme génétique* (Paris: PUF, 2008), 9–13, as well as my article "D'une rencontre fertile de Bergson et Bachelard: l'ontologie génétique de Simondon," in *Bergson et Bachelard: Continuité et discontinuité*, ed. Frédéric Worms and Jean-Jacques Wunenburger (Paris: PUF, 2008), 223–38. On Bachelard's constancy, pertinence, as well as his limits regarding his relation to Husserlian phenomenology, see Bernard Barsotti's *Bachelard critique de Husserl* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003).

potentially, precisely at the high point of the interrogation of non-objectivity through the thematics of "worldhood" and "meaningfulness" (*Bedeutsamkeit*). In fact, it is in §§ 12–18 of *Sein und Zeit* that, in the first place, being-in-the-world proves to be irreducible to an object of knowledge, knowledge being rather only a mode of being-in-the-world. At the same time it is revealed that *praxis* is still inherent in *theoria*, the latter being a mode or dimension of a *praxis* which, when "ontologized" in a non-materialist way—such are the commonalities and the difference between Marx and Heidegger—is equivalent to being-in-the-world because it is multi-modal or multi-dimensional. Indeed, there is a kind of multi-dimensionality to being-in-the-world, a multi-dimensionality whose establishment the thematic of "meaningfulness" would have permitted had Heidegger not made it into a simple system of "reference" instead of multi-dimensionally diffracting every signification—here understood as representation ("tree," "table," "concept," etc.). But, multi-dimensionally diffracting every signification is the same as no longer speaking of anything but the sense *that makes me*, and it is certainly here that Heidegger—who was less interested in giving a new meaning to Thales's "know thyself" than in revisiting the thinking of Being—was unable to accept the consequences of his questioning, unless in the later form of a tautological thinking seeking to *say* something without speaking *about* something. So this new questioning that I have in mind radically interrogates the attitude of the philosophizing individual himself. It is the multi-dimensional diffraction of significations that prevents the philosophizing individual from continuing to reduce significations to identities of *ob*-jects of the mind, and therefore from continuing to unknowingly absolutize himself as someone not-constituted by the sense "present-at-hand," and so as originary or a "*subjectum*": the multi-dimensional diffraction of significations would allow the philosophizing individual to adopt a completely anti-natural *attitude* which would not contradict the *thesis* of this philosophizing individual on the finitude of *Dasein* as constituted by being-in-the-world.

Now, while it is not possible here to effect the multi-dimensional diffraction of significations so as to elaborate the new radically non-objectivizing problematic, it is at least possible to indicate how this internal overturning of Heideggerian questioning brings about an all-encompassing relativization—which is also to say a validation—of Simondon's genetic ontology, where the only error was to think of it as "first philosophy."[43] The difference between *multi*-dimensional sense and the object of knowledge *which is certainly a dimension of sense—but only one dimension*—translates (internally, this time, to this sole dimension of sense that is the object of knowledge) into the difference between individual and substance. Now, it is precisely the difference between individual and substance that is foundational for Simondon's genetic ontology: knowledge of individuation is knowledge of beings as relations and not substances. If this knowledge is also individuation of knowledge, and genetic ontology claims to be first philosophy and not a secondary translation, however appropriate, of another problematic, then Simondon certainly needs the knowledge of individuation to be a non-objectivizing knowledge. But it is contradictory to claim a knowledge that is at the same time non-objectivizing, and Simondon in fact continues to objectivize significations, manipulating them to make them equal to what he is speaking about, instead of thinking of sense as individuating itself in him. And another contradiction goes hand in hand with this one: Simondon attributes to the knowledge of individuation the privilege of being individuation of knowledge, but he at the same time affirms that all knowledge

43 For an account of the difficulties Simondon encounters here, as well as the resolution of these difficulties brought by the "all-encompassing relativization" of his ontology within a System of Philosophical Relativity now opened by a "philosophical semantic" (one in which the philosophizing individual only claims to think the sense *by which he is produced*), see the last chapter of my book *Penser la connaissance et la technique après Simondon* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005). The program of Philosophical Relativity is also expounded, more pedagogically, in my article "Penser après Simondon et par-delà Deleuze," in *Cahiers Simondon No. 2*, ed. Jean-Hugues Barthélémy (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2010).

is individuation of knowledge and that the theory of knowledge must not precede ontogenesis.[44] These contradictions reveal that knowledge of individuation remains a knowledge and can only claim to be non-objectivizing because it *appropriately translates*, in the sole ontological dimension, the radically non-objectivizing attitude which the philosophizing individual must adopt in the *first* problematic—a first problematic which should multi-dimensionally diffract every signification, only then to translate itself in each of the dimensions of sense thus released, and rediscover, in one of these uni-dimensional translations, Simondon's genetic ontology and the truth of his non-anthropology.

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44 See Simondon, *L'individuation à la lumière des notions de forme et d'information*, 36, 264 and 284.

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